

Am I A Child Of God?

By Elder Buddy Abernathy

Will I go to heaven or hell when I die? For anyone who believes in the reality of the two, the answer to this question reveals all that ultimately matters about their future. When contrasting an average earthly life span of seventy to eighty years with the eternity of heaven and hell, every other future event should seem insignificant. Many Christian and non-Christian religions teach that the answer to this question is easily determined, while others rely on factors which are more difficult to quantify. For example, some Christian religions teach that you must simply accept Christ and/or be baptized while others stress the importance of a godly life or perseverance in faith. Whatever the case, most religions teach that man controls his destiny as determined by his compliance with various requirements.

Primitive Baptists, however, approach the question from an entirely different viewpoint. They believe that, before the foundation of the world, God chose or elected a particular people and predestinated them, “*unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will*” (Eph. 1:5). They believe that Jesus came into the world and saved them (Mat. 1:21, 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 10:14, 2 Tim. 1:8-11). They believe the Holy Ghost gives them spiritual life. (John 5:25, Eph. 2:1, 2 Tim. 1:8-11). They believe God did the choosing, Jesus did the saving, and the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. So in effect, the question becomes, “Did God choose me?”

When a child of God is born of the Spirit, he begins to feel a sense of sin. He no longer enjoys the worldly pleasures that were once a regular part of his life. (1 Pet. 4:3-4). He needs to understand what has happened to him and what he can do to feel better. He needs to be taught that Jesus saved him from his sins. He then ought to profess his faith in Christ through baptism, “*...the answer of a good conscience toward God...*” (1 Pet. 3:21).

In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus uses the expression, “*come to me*” when teaching about the new birth, i.e. the giving of spiritual life. He says, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me...*” (John 6:37). In other words, all of those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world will be born of the Spirit. In Matthew’s account of the gospel, Jesus uses the expression, “*come unto me*”, as an invitation for his children to come and find rest, “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” (Mat. 11:28). Combining the passages, we conclude that all of God’s elect people will come to Jesus in the sense of being born of the Spirit and, having received spiritual life, they are encouraged to come unto Jesus and find rest for their souls. Since we generally think of the expression, “*come to me*”, as an invitation, let’s attempt to establish why this is not Jesus’ intended meaning in the sixth chapter of John.

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was now

come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.....When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." (John 6:14-21, 24-26)

The people wanted to make Jesus a king because they saw the miracle he performed when feeding the five thousand. Later on, as the disciples were crossing the sea to Capernaum, Jesus appeared to them, walking on the water. After receiving him on the ship, he continued with them to the other side. When the people crossed over and found Jesus, they asked him, *When camest thou hither?* (v. 25) Jesus then told them that they were looking for him because they had been well fed. The people were not following Jesus for spiritual reasons. They wanted to get free food.

Jesus then instructs them,

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, what sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." (John 6:27-31)

After Jesus introduces the subject of spiritual food, they ask, *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?"* Jesus then informed them that believing on him is the work of God. In response they ask Jesus to show them a sign so that they may see and believe. Notice that they are only interested in those things which intrigue their carnal mind and refuse to believe on Jesus unless he provides more visible evidence of his supernatural power. Then they recall how God miraculously provided for their fathers by furnishing them *"bread from heaven"* (natural food). They expressed no interest in *"that meat which endureth unto everlasting life"*.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not." (John 6:32-36).

Jesus is not talking about the same bread they are talking about. Jesus is speaking of spiritual food and identifies himself as the “*true bread*”. Although they respond by saying, “*evermore give us this bread*”, it is evident that they are still thinking only in terms of the “*meat which perisheth*” because Jesus says again, “*I am the bread of life*”. He satisfies the appetite of those who “*...hunger and thirst after righteousness...*” (Mat. 5:6). Spiritual nourishment is provided to those who come to him and to those who believe on him. (Isaiah 55:1). However, it is clear that they do not comprehend what Jesus is talking about because he says, “*ye also have seen me, and believe not.*”

*"All that the Father giveth me shall **come to me**; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37)*

The people conversing with Jesus do not understand that he is “*the bread of life*”; therefore, he begins to speak of a particular group of people. Jesus emphasizes that all of his people (*all that the father giveth me*, i.e. the elect) will come to him and will never be lost (“*cast out*”). A correct understanding of the expression, “*come to me*”, is crucial to the interpretation of this portion of the dialog.

In our language today, we generally use this expression with the idea that the one who is instructed to “*come*” will do so by exerting their will and strength to move toward the one instructing them to “*come*”. If we say to our child, “*come to me*”, we are instructing the child to exercise his own strength to move from his present location to our location. Jesus used the expression in this manner when he said, “*Come unto, me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” (Mat. 11:28) Jesus invites those who have spiritual life, evidenced by their need for rest, to come unto him. However, in the sixth chapter of John, Jesus is not giving an invitation.

*No man can **come to me**, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)*

No man has the ability to come unless the Father draws him. The word “*draw*” means to “*drag*” (see Strong’s G1670) in the same sense that you would draw water from a well. The water is moved against the force of gravity and comes to the location of the person who is drawing it. The water contributes nothing to the process of coming to the one who is drawing it. To further illustrate this concept, think of a “*come-along*” (also known as a “*power puller*”) which is a hand operated winch with a ratchet used to pull objects. The original tool of this type was developed in 1919, an era in which modern power equipment was not available. A come-along is useful in that a man can use it to move a heavy object which otherwise could not be moved with his own strength. The object being moved contributes no work to the moving process.

*It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, **cometh unto me**. (John 6:45)*

Notice the terminology used as Jesus draws from the Old Testament to support his assertion that, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*”. He quotes from the prophet

Jeremiah, “*they shall be all taught of God.*” (Jeremiah 31:34, Heb. 8:11) Jesus equates the dynamic of “hearing”, “learning”, and “coming” with being “*taught of God*”. What did Jeremiah have in mind when he used this expression? He wrote, “*But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:33-34)*” To be taught of God, according to Jeremiah, includes having God’s law put in their inward parts and written in their hearts which results in him being their God and them being his people. He is speaking here of spiritual birth, i.e. vitally becoming his people. All are taught of God, consequently, all know God. Jesus said that to know God is to have eternal life (John 17:3). Therefore, when Jesus says, “*Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*”, he is speaking of an effective call in which he is active and those who are coming to him are passive. “Coming to Jesus”, in the sense of this text, does not involve deliberate action on the part of the one who is coming. To teach otherwise, is to contradict the whole concept taught by Jeremiah.

*And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can **come unto me**, except it were given unto him of my Father. (John 6:65)*

This passage is teaching the same principle as verse 44 but Jesus uses the expression, “*except it were given unto him of my father*” instead of “*except the Father which hath sent me draw him*”. “It”, i.e., “the coming” is given by God. He does the drawing (dragging). The one being drawn is the passive object of God’s work.

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:38-40)

Jesus came to earth to do his Father’s will which was to “*save his people from their sins*” (Mat. 1:21). By his death, burial, and resurrection; Jesus accomplished his Father’s will. Therefore, all those who “*seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.*” All of those who believe on him have already been born of the Spirit (John 1:12-13, 1 John 5:1). They already possess spiritual life (John 5:24). It is God’s will that believers have everlasting life. But without the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, believers (people born of the Spirit) would perish. Paul emphasizes this point in his epistle to the church at Corinth. He identifies his audience as those who “*are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*”. Obviously he is writing to people who are born of the Spirit. Yet he teaches them that, “*if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in*

Christ are perished.” (1 Cor. 15:17-18). Paul is teaching the church that without the resurrection of Christ, believers will not have everlasting life.

All of those who believe on Jesus are born of the Spirit and Jesus did what was necessary that they may have everlasting life. However, not all of those who have everlasting life will believe on Jesus. Consider Jerusalem who killed prophets and stoned God’s messengers, yet Jesus said he would have gathered them together if they had followed him (Mat 23:37-39); the “way side” hearer who has the word “sown in his heart” but doesn’t understand it (Mat. 13:4, 19); the rich young ruler who disobeyed the call to follow Jesus, yet Jesus loved him (Mark 10:17-25); those among both the Jews and Gentiles who believed not, yet God had mercy upon them (Rom. 11:25-32); and the ones whose faith was overthrown, yet God knew they were his (2 Tim. 2:13, 16-19).

Paul wrote to the church of Thessalonica, “*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:*” (1 The. 1:4-6) Paul observed the effect of the gospel and was persuaded that they were children of God. However, there are other evidences of eternal life displayed in the lives of some who never openly profess their faith in Christ. When describing the “*fruit of the Spirit*”, Paul listed behaviors that are sometimes independent of any particular religious profession: “*...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...*” (Gal. 5:22-23).

So how do you know that you are one of the elect of God? Job said, “*...I abhor myself...*” (Job 42:6). Jacob said, “*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;...*” (Gen. 32:10). David said, “*...verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*” (Psa. 39:5). “*For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*” (Psa. 32:4). “*For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*” (Psa. 51:3, 9, & 11). “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*” (Psa. 51:17). “*I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.*” (Psa. 102:6-7). “*He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.*” (Psa. 102:17). “*He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*” (Psa. 103:10). “*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*” (Psa. 130:3). Isaiah described the man who has God’s attention, “*...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*” (Isa. 66:2). After seeing God, he says, “*...Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*” (Isa. 6:5). Jeremiah said, “*It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*” (Lam. 3:22). Through Zephaniah, God said, “*I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.*” (Zep. 3:12). Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to, “*the poor in spirit,*

they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake". (see Mat. 5:3-10). "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mat. 11:28). He also spoke of a "...publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13) Jesus then said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified..." (Luke 18:14). "...They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." (Luke 5:31). Paul said, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Cor. 15:9). "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" (Eph. 3:8). "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15). "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

If these verses describe the condition of your soul, then you are a child of God and you ought to publicly profess your faith in Christ, believing he is your only hope of eternal life. Your sense of unworthiness is clear evidence of your worthiness in the one who was made *"to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* (2 Cor. 5:21) Publicly professing faith in Christ and following him in baptism is the duty and privilege of every child of God.

"O, how happy are they who their Saviour obey, and whose treasures are laid up above! Tongue can never express the sweet comfort and peace, of a soul in its earliest love. That sweet comfort was mine when the favor divine I first found in the blood of the lamb; when the truth I believed, O, what joy I received! What a heaven in Jesus' sweet name! ...Now my remnant of days would I spend to his praise, who hath died my poor soul to redeem; whether many or few, all my years are his due, may they all be devoted to Him." (Charles Wesley, 1749)

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